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ABSTRACT

The rationale for the establishment of a curriculum in the recently founded University of Sussex, England, which does not offer full programs in classical or medieval studies, is examined in this paper. Intent on developing a program which has as its scope "a general background in European culture", the university offers programs, through its School of European Studies, which combine the study of history, philosophy, and literature. Descriptions of course offerings and options for the student are illustrated by frequent textual reference throughout the commentary. (RL)

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The Place of Classics in a New University

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It was an initial decision of the founders of the University of Sussex to establish no specialised teaching of Greek and Latin. For this there was a cogent reason. The existing classical departments seemed likely to be able to cope with the numbers of classical specialists who are coming up from the schools. (When an existing classical department sees a new university being founded without a classical department, should it feel relief at being spared a rival's claim on a limited number of classical specialists, or regrets that the status of classical studies has been weakened?) Moreover, it was implicit in the original Sussex plans that it should be a modern-minded and forward-looking university, with its centre of gravity in contemporary studies. Therefore, just as it was decided not (at any rate for the present) to have classical studies, so it was decided not (at any rate for the present) to have medieval studies. The chief way of lightening the specialist load of the modern linguist and modern historian has been to jettison the medieval aspects of their subjects. (Here perhaps a false analogy lurks, because a much larger proportion of historians than of linguists become medieval specialists.) It was argued that the classical or medieval specialist has plenty of scope among the older universities.

This negative decision was the obverse, however, of the determination to make a new approach to university studies, and especially to avoid organisation by departments. It was desired

to combine the benefits of a specialised with a general education, and to break down the partition walls between specialisms by organising the University not in departments but in loose and flexible Schools of Studies. For half their work, Sussex undergraduates specialise in a particular discipline – their major subject. For the other half of their work, they study a broad background to their particular discipline, organised by the School they have chosen to belong to, in company with undergraduates majoring in different disciplines.

Among the three earliest of such Schools of Studies is the School of European Studies, conceived as the grouping of teachers and students whose focus of interest is European civilisation. The School of European Studies no doubt owed something to the apparent likelihood of Britain's entering the Common Market. It has owed more to the attempt at Oxford, in the years after 1945, to introduce a 'European Greats', a degree based on the integrated study of the history, philosophy and literature of medieval and modern Europe, comparable to Honour Mods. and Greats in relation to classical civilisation. In planning European Studies, we have had the aim of producing modern linguists, historians, philosophers, economists, political scientists and geographers, who would know their own subjects in depth, and at the same time would be able to relate them to a general background of European culture.

How to interpret and give content to this phrase, 'a general background of European culture'? The first answer was that all undergraduates in the School of European Studies should do, among their background or contextual papers, one on the foundations of European civilisation. If historians and linguists were to begin their studies not earlier than the sixteenth century, with the emergence of 'modern' Europe (in the sense in which modern is contrasted with medieval as well as with ancient), they ought to know something of the European debate up to that point. The aim of this paper, then, is to open for them some windows on both the classical and the medieval worlds. What form should such a paper take?

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There were several possibilities. It might have been conceived as a paper in social and political history, a study of the development of Europe as a distinct community. But the central idea of the School of European Studies is to approach European civilisation through the combined study of history, philosophy and literature; and it is intellectual history, the history of ideas, which provides the intellectual thread or axis of the School, the ground where they all meet. There are basic principles underlying this. One is the conviction that an essential part of education is communion with the finest minds, a study of some of the great works which, like Thucydides or Lucretius, the *City of God* or the *Divine Comedy*, transcend our limiting distinctions between the literary, the historical, the philosophical and the scientific. Another is that a humane education, in the desirable sense, must still centre upon literature, as the vehicle in which the shared values of a civilisation are carried down and in which its moral consensus can be discovered, criticised and renewed. On this view, the array of historical, sociological and scientific techniques which have come to assist and surround the humane studies have only an ancillary role. The argument may have a bearing on classical studies themselves. Classical conferences, in their eagerness to show that their subject has a contemporary relevance, sometimes congratulate themselves that they too can make use of the techniques of anthropology, psychology, aerial photography, infra-red photography of documents, and dating by radio-carbon and remanent magnetism. Well and good; but this is not why we still want to read Aeschylus and Horace, why τὸ σοφὸν οὐ φθονῶ χαίρω θηρεύουσα and *plenum exiliis mare, infecti caedibus scopuli* nourish our being at the roots. Is there perhaps a danger that the fascinations of Linear-B and the prosopography of the Roman Senate may develop a new scholasticism, that will suffocate the simple moral and literary response to the classics as did degenerate philology for the generation of Nicholas Murray Butler and Housman?

The majority of Europeans ('c'est aussi une majorité que celle qui se compte par générations', as Guizot said) would agree that

the distinctive intellectual tradition of Europe is one of moral philosophy. This was one line of thought in devising the 'Foundations' paper. Another was to enquire, what aspects of Greek, of Roman, of medieval civilisation are most worth knowing about? To ask what is the most important intellectual achievement of Greece might invite several conflicting answers. How does one distinguish between the *Iliad*, the *Oresteia*, Thucydides, the *Bacchae*, the *Republic*, the *Ethics*? But if our question is, what was the most important event in Greek history, there might be a measure of agreement about answering, 'the death of Socrates'. Let the *Apology* and *Phaedo* therefore be the set books on Greece. Roman literature by contrast has one all-surpassing peak, and the only reason against setting the *Aeneid* was that it might be too hackneyed, and spoiled by the experience of the G.C.E. (There was an original intention of setting Cicero's *De Officiis*, as illustrating the natural law tradition of moral philosophy; but this proved difficult to obtain in a good translation – Dr. Grant's admirable Penguin volume contains only book iii.) Medieval civilisation too is summed up in a single master-piece, the *Divine Comedy*, which, both for the Virgilian link and for the literary contrasts, it is useful to study together with the *Aeneid*. Here, then, were the chosen windows on the formative phases of European civilisation, and the texts illustrating its tradition of moral awareness. These set books are to be read, of course, in translation: the *Apology and Phaedo* in Livingstone's volume *Portrait of Socrates*, and the *Aeneid* in Mr. Jackson Knight's Penguin version. But the existence of the Temple Classics Dante, with Italian and English on facing pages, made it possible to prescribe that while the *Divine Comedy* too was to be studied in translation, students would be expected to recognise quotations from the original.

It was a justified criticism of this course that it was too literary, and ignored the interests of the student who might be going to major in geography or economics. Accordingly an alternative option has been provided, to illustrate the parallel tradition of political thought in classical and medieval history: with the

Republic, selections from Aquinas's political writings, and Machiavelli's *Prince* as the set books. But the appeal of Virgil and Dante seems so great that, in the second year, this alternative has found no takers.

The paper just described is *sui generis*. It is a background paper, covering ground which is included in no major subject. But there are two other attempts in the Sussex syllabus to integrate classical literature in translation into general European literature. One is a literature paper in the Preliminary Examination taken by undergraduates expecting to enter the School of European Studies. It is called 'Critical Reading: European Tragedy and Fiction', and seeks to introduce freshmen to these literary forms, and to the concerns of literary criticism, through a selection of seminal works. There is a core of texts common to all students in the School, with additional texts in the different modern languages that may be offered. For tragedy, the common texts are *Oedipus Rex*, *King Lear*, and *Hedda Gabler*; for fiction, the *Odyssey*, the *Decameron* in selections, *Emma* and *Madame Bovary*. This probably represents the balance between classical and modern literature that might be expected in a systematic attempt to combine them in a single syllabus. The same principle appears in a paper in the English major subject called 'Tragedy', which has been happily imported from Cambridge, and includes Greek, Elizabethan, French neo-classic, and modern European tragedy.

The classicist's question about all such attempts at conveying classical literature in translation is whether they will stimulate an interest in Latin and Greek themselves and a desire to get behind translations to the originals. On this no positive evidence has come to hand, beyond unsolicited statements of awareness of deprivation through being unable to read the classical languages. But it has been encouraging to find two students, innocent of any Italian except what can be inferred from A-level Latin and French, battering their way through the whole of the *Comedy* in the original in the vacation before working for this paper, and many more quoting the Italian

freely in their essays. And one was agreeably surprised by the amount of what Professor Brink has called 'small Latin' which is still brought from school to university, generally to rust unused, but here to be eagerly refurbished. The first year's teaching for the 'Foundations' paper revealed a good number of students who already have acquaintance with Virgil, having done a book of the *Aeneid* for O-level or A-level, and who could be excited by consolidating what they already know. Some said that, now they had read the whole *Aeneid* through, they could appreciate much better the Fourth or Sixth Books read in Latin. (There are however classics teachers in schools who know the value of allowing the use of translations.) So many essays quoted the *Aeneid* in Latin rather than in translation that one wondered whether the rubric devised for Dante might not be extended to Virgil. Some showed a knowledge of Horace's *Odes* as well; and there was a general wish, in lectures on the development of Virgil's thought, to have the illustrative passages from the *Georgics* in the original, as well as translated. Now these students, who are modern linguists and historians, would have had no incentive in a conventional French or History department to maintain their little classical knowledge.

There is at Sussex another paper in which classical interests can be shown. In the original plans the history to be taught in the School of European Studies was limited to modern history. In the course of the first year it was decided to put on two options in ancient history – the Fall of Athens (478-362 B.C.) and the Roman Revolution (78 B.C.-14 A.D.). The result was that as many undergraduates in European Studies chose Greek History as any other history period. Why has Greek history been among the most popular historical options, and this with the abler undergraduates too? Partly, perhaps, romantic notions of sunshine on the Acropolis and triremes rippling over the blue Aegean, nourished by *The Last of the Wine*. Partly a desire to get away from the nineteenth century history done at school. Partly a wish to read more of Plato and more about Plato, inspired by having read the *Apology* and *Phaedo* (and the *Meno*, *Protagoras*,

and parts of the *Republic* as well) for the European Foundations paper. Mainly, I think, intelligent desire to study one of the peaks of human experience. And teaching this period has confirmed the value of ancient history as a historical discipline for Greekless students, and their ability to grapple usefully with the *Athenaion Politeia* and the *Athenian Tribute Lists* as well as with the dramatists, and to gain an understanding of Thucydides' reputation as a supreme historian.

The short and uncertain record of a new university perhaps allows some general reflections. First, in so far as the new universities may not start out with classical studies, they will not attract applications from classical specialists, who will continue to go elsewhere. But one may be reasonably confident that though classical studies may be neglected initially *tamen usque recurrent*. It is already clear at Sussex that the School of European Studies would accommodate a major in Latin as well as it does a major in a modern language: and a major in classical studies, against the background of the later development of European civilisation, is an intriguing speculation. It will not come in this quinquennium, but it may in the next, to attract applicants wanting something broader than is offered by existing classical departments.

But in twenty years' time the Sussex experiments will probably seem cautious and conservative. Classical studies themselves are not untouched by the restlessness that is apparent among university teachers about the present organisation of academic knowledge. There is a widespread desire to re-examine the relations between the traditional Arts subjects, and to find new connections and groupings. Others of the new universities besides Sussex are likely to try to organise European civilisation as a unit of undergraduate study. This may lead to a breaking down, on the one side, of the disciplinary divisions between history, philosophy and literature; on the other side, of the chronological divisions between classical, medieval and modern studies. Hitherto we have said that a man is educated who has an honours degree in, for example, classics, or French language

and literature, or history, or philosophy. We might move into another period of culture which is prepared to see an educated man in one who has taken an honours degree in the study of any three of the following imaginary examples: the Athens of Pericles and Plato, the Rome of Cicero and Virgil, or of Julian and Augustine, the Twelfth Century Renaissance, the Age of Dante, the Italian Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution. Each of these is a critical and representative moment in the experience of Europe, and each can be studied, in depth, by the combination of historical, literary and philosophical disciplines. The linguistic implications of such a development would be for the prescribed texts to be read in the original by those candidates who were able to keep up their languages by regular class-work (and who would of course obtain special credit on this account) and in translation by others. In such a development, the lecturer in classics would find himself one of a larger team than he has been used to, and commanding the attention of more undergraduates though for a smaller proportion of their time. He might well find that he was exchanging, not sound knowledge for superficiality, but mediocre specialisation for wider understanding and fresh insights. There may be a new life for classical studies, as an integral part of the finals work of undergraduates who will major in some subject other than classics.

This could mean a new deal for under-privileged classicists – I mean those who would never be among the aristocracy who can use a gradus, but who none the less are sincerely moved by the classical literature they have begun to read, and would like to maintain their ability to read it and even to read more. Of these it can be hoped that they might graduate in middle life into the class to which Sir Harold Nicolson once confessed that he belonged, who read their Loebs on the right-hand page but mark them on the left-hand page.

More important, it could bring advantages for the ordinary mediocre student. I have in mind the student whom the conventional specialised honours system compels to make an early

choice of subject which he often admits to have been determined not by intelligent commitment, but by fortuitous circumstance; who will get no more than a lower second in finals; and who suffers from an uncertainty about the kind of man that is admirable and the kind of life that is desirable, a spiritual malaise which makes the traditional university subjects largely irrelevant to his personal needs. It is permissible to hope that the founding of the new universities is part of an educational trend which will make universities in general regard it as their concern to do more than train minds to the highest degree of competence, by providing a more balanced education for the second-class student. And if a tincture of classical studies will not help the young to satisfy their desire for intellectual and creative completeness, why our efforts to keep classical studies alive?

If there is anything in this, then classical teachers who are struggling to convert O-level Latin or Greek into a vehicle for as wide a reading knowledge as possible of classical literature, aided by a judiciously unconventional use of translations and dictionaries, and unembarrassed by prose compositions – such teachers may think less unkindly of the new universities.

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